Our Penance Combined

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Summary: *AU with spoilers* Unable to will himself to destroy Zelos's Cruxis Crystal, Lloyd carries it with him as a memento, believing that he is keeping a small piece of Zelos alive. Little does he know, it contains more of his friend that he originally thinks, and equipping the crystal leaves both he and Zelos to deal with a much deeper problem as their consciousness begin to merge.

1. Prologue

"Well, Zelos, it's over, "Lloyd began with a sigh. He sat on the roof on the inn in the quiet of the night, torn between watching the stars above or Zelos' Cruxis Crystal held gently in his hands. The final battle with Mithos was over, the tree restored, the worlds united, and the party had gone to Luin for a long deserved rest. Lloyd however, found himself unable to sleep, needing to find closure with one of his fallen comrades.

"I don't even know if you can hear me, but I can't help but feel like part of you is still alive in your Crystal. I know you want me to destroy it, but you have to understand how hard it was toâ€¦" He let out a shaky breath, looking mournfully at the gem. "I haven't had a good night's sleep since I-since I killed you. I can't get the image out of my head. I know I've killed a lot of people; Desians, angles, anyone who tried to stop us, and it's hard enough for me to accept that I've taken so many lives. But at least I can try to justify it. No matter how hard I try to convince myself I had no choice, I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive myself for killing you. You weren't a bad person, Zelos, and I keep telling myself that maybe if I trusted you more you would have seen that for yourself.

"I know a lot of the time you were spying on us, but I still can't shake the feeling that part of you actually wanted to help us. I just wish thatâ€¦ If you wanted to die so badly, you didn't make me be the one to do it. Maybeâ€¦I didn't trust you as much as I could have. But you didn't make it easy for me, you know? You kept lying and hiding

things from us, so what was I supposed to do? As much as I wanted to think you were on our side, I just couldn't justify taking that chance and causing more trouble for everyone, you know?

"I know it's unfair of me to do this to you, especially after you specifically asked me toâ€¦to destroy this, but I justâ€¦ It was hard enough for me to fight you, so please don't make me kill this too. Just let me be a little selfish for once. I really thought you'd be fighting with us against Cruxis, and I think it's too soon for me to really come to terms with what happened, so just let me keep this with me a little bit longer."

2. The Secret

CHAPTER 1

Five months after the World Regeneration

Raine huffed, putting her quill down to rub the bridge of her nose. "Genis, I don't know what you expect me to do about it."

"I'm just worried. Something with him isn't right."

"Have you tried asking him? Lloyd isn't the type to hide things."

"I did! Multiple times. He always says he's fine, and usually I can believe him, but sometimes it feels like he's just saying to get me to stop asking. I'm really worried something's wrong."

"Alright, I'll have a talk with him tomorrow. Now would you please let me finish this, Genis? I have a deadline."

"Fine," he mumbled. "But I'm not making it up."

* * *

><p>Lloyd rapped on the Sages' front door, announcing himself before a muffled "Come in" answered from inside. Letting himself in, he found Raine sitting at her desk with papers and book scatted across it. "Genis said you were looking for me," he greeted, taking a seat.<p>

Closing a book on a marked page, Raine turned to her pupil. "I was. I wanted to ask how your journey went. Two months is a long time. You must be exhausted."

"Yeah. Sorry I didn't stop in yesterday. I just wanted to go home and sleep in my own bed," he chuckled. "I wouldn't really say it went well. I guess 'successful' is a better way to put it. I mean, we collected a lot of expheres, but most of the people we took them from were Desians, so we didn't have much of a choice but to use force."

Raine nodded wisely, understanding fully well what he meant. She knew how much Lloyd despised taking lives, but Desians were the type to leave them no choice. "You did what you had to."

"Yeah, I guess."

A short silence passed between them before Raine spoke up again. "Genis says you've been acting different lately."

Lloyd sighed. "I figured that would come up. I've just got a lot on my mind."

"Well, there's a lot of changes happening right now in the world."

"No, it's not that."

"Well, you have gone through a lot. We all have. It only makes sense-"

"Professor," he interrupted cautiously. "How much do you know about Cruxis Crystals?"

Raine's eyes immediately went to Lloyd's exphere. "It's not still evolving, is it?"

"No, it-it's not mine."

"Lloyd," she started sternly. "If someone has a Cruxis crys-"

"Just," he interjected tentatively, "let me show you." Unable to meet Raine's eyes, Lloyd slowly reached up and began to undo the buttons on his collar. A few buttons down, he hesitated before slowly opening the top of his jacket. Beneath the red fabric, embedded in the top of Lloyd's chest shone a bright red crystal encircled by a simple key crest.

"Lloydâ€¦where did you-"

"Zelos," he answered quickly.

"â€¦How long?"

"Several months. Since the first time I went out to collect expheres."

"What about the key crest? Where did you get it?"

"I-I took it off a Desian. It took a lot of looking, but I wanted to find one that looked like what Zelos had," he admitted.

Raine sighed heavily, trying to take the gravity of the situation in. "Lloyd, you can't just use a normal key crest for a Cruxis Crystal."

"I know that, but it's better than nothing. I didn't have much of a choice."

"What do you mean you had no choice? The placement of that Cruxis Crystal doesn't exactly look accidental," she stated accusingly.

Lloyd took a moment to respond, trying to figure out the best way to explain. "Zelosâ€¦is alive in this. Not just a part of him, but his whole consciousness. It's actually him. I didn't realize that when I

equipped it though."

"You mean he's fully aware?"

"Yeah, like how Yggdrasil was when his Cruxis Crystal attached to Collette after we released Origin. Except Zelos isn't doing that. He's kinda staying dormant in the back of my mind. We had a long talk about what happened, and took a while, but I convinced Zelos to let me help him. So now I'm trying to find a way to get him a physical form again so he can have a second chance and live the life he wants, not just through me."

Raine needed to take a moment to process everything that was being said. "Lloyd," she started carefully, "I know you feel guilty about what happened with Zelos, but we didn't have a choice. You can't save everyone, especially at the cost of your own life."

Despite already knowing this, he couldn't help being visibly upset. "Well what was I supposed to do? I wasn't just gonna carry his crystal around for who knows how long. I couldn't leave him alone like that. Besides, I promised him-"

"Lloyd, listen to me. You can't help people if you sacrifice yourself. You need accept that you can't be there for everyone, even when they make the wrong choice."

"â€¦So what should I do then?"

"The first thing is to find out how to make a proper key crest."

"But Professor, I can't-"

"I know, you promised to help him," she replied gently. "But you won't be of help to anyone if you put your own life in danger. I'm not telling you to break your promise. We can figure that out once we make sure you're safe."

Lloyd looked as though he was about to respond before moving his gaze to nothing in particular, brow creasing for a moment before a small smile tugged at the corner of his lips. Catching Raine's concerned look, he quietly mumbled something to himself before giving a brief but telling explanation. "Sorry, Zelos had to put his two cents in. He completely agrees with you."

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><p>Post-Script<p>

One of he hard things I've noticed about starting to write this story is that stylistically it's mostly going to be dialogue, so I need A) the characters to describe everything without making them too much out of character and B) making sure the story flows. Likely I'll be using the post-script to add information that I couldn't find a way to fit into the story. Also yes, Zelos is going to make his grand appearance next chapter.

End
file.